

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT

SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING

Minutes of August 24, 2021

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse (7:21 p.m.), and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Lawton Rutter (Northfield Ambulance Service), Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Participants had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

- IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None.

- V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT**

- a. Lawton Rutter, Northfield Ambulance Chief.** Chair Maxwell first wanted it noted that, as indicated on the front page of our local newspaper last week, Chief Rutter recently was selected as the recipient of the Virginia Caffin Award as the Vermont EMS District 6 EMS Provider of the Year. Chief Rutter said Ms. Caffin established the Cabot Ambulance Service with her husband in 1966 and is considered the founder of modern Emergency Medical Services in the Central Vermont area. She was very instrumental in developing EMS training procedures, etc. The District 6 EMS Board annually chooses the person who best represents her legacy to receive this namesake award. Chief Rutter is a member of the board and the other board members took measures to keep the award a surprise as long as possible. The award is a great honor as many of the previous recipients are quite distinguished with lifetime achievements in local EMS. He is very honored to be in their company. Chair Maxwell then congratulated Chief Rutter for this much-deserved public recognition.

Chief Rutter began his report by noting the arrival of Norwich University (NU) "Rooks" this past week has contributed to make things busy for the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS). There have been twelve (12) contacts with NU students already including some that required transfers to the Central Vermont Medical Center (CVMC). This upsurge came after a relatively quiet month of July. Chief Rutter added that in addition to the added workload, there are significant benefits to the return of NU students as many over the years have served as NAS volunteers. Although they cannot put in too many hours due to their classwork, their presence does take some strain off the year-round volunteers. Chief Rutter said the current "Rook Week" will culminate next Sunday (08/29/21) with the Dog River Run. NAS will provide standby services in case of any scrapes, turned ankles, etc. Chief Rutter noted that the NU infirmary currently is open by appointment only. Therefore, any NU-related patient has the option of transport to CVMC or waiting until an appointment can be made. This situation does add additional strain to CVMC, which can be short staffed at various times of the day.

Looking as NAS calls for service during FY 2020-2021, Chief Rutter noted that there was a seventeen percent (17%) decrease from the previous fiscal year. Over this twelve-month period, NAS had 736 Calls for Service and 783 Total Run Sheets, which resulted in 586 billable events. In April 2021, NAS received paramedic status and in the remaining three (3) months of the fiscal year NAS paramedics handled twenty-six (26) paramedic calls and the number of intercepts by outside agencies was reduced to eight (8). As each paramedic intercept costs the municipality about \$250 each, this will be great cost savings over time. This past month had eight (8) local responses that required a paramedic and only once was an outside agency contacted. There also will be some additional revenue benefits as the narcotics the paramedics provide to patients are a billable expense.

Board member Morse joined the meeting remotely at this time.

Regarding the aforementioned seventeen percent (17%) decrease in NAS calls, Chair Maxwell was surprised given the COVID-19 pandemic. He has assumed that ambulance calls would increase as a result. Chief Rutter said the CVMC, which was overwhelmed at times with COVID-19 patients, asked that patients not be transported there but rather treated on scene if that was an option. In addition, there was a decline in non-emergency transports as several residents chose to defer medical procedures for non-life-threatening illnesses or injuries due to concerns about contracting COVID-19 at medical facilities. As for NAS staffing, Chief Rutter said it is in good shape especially with the expedited return of NU student EMTs. There have been some NAS volunteers who have cut back their hours due to concerns about contracting COVID-19 during ambulance calls as well as some long-time volunteers who have decided to reduce their workloads due to other responsibilities. Chief Rutter said the Vermont EMS Board is developing a new certification level that would allow potential volunteers to provide ancillary services, such as driving ambulance units, after a reduced number of training hours. This would be good for those who would like to contribute to local emergency services but cannot commit to hundreds of hours of traditional EMS training. It also could provide a way for retired EMTs to return to service in lesser roles. The protocols for this new certification should be finalized by next January. Chair Maxwell asked how local EMTs are recruited. Chief Rutter said NU students are a good source and he also does some advertising on various venues. There also is outreach to high school students who might be interested in future careers in the medical field.

Chief Rutter also serves as Northfield's Health Officer and he has a number of active cases that include landlord/tenant disputes, neighbor issues, etc. He noted that with people staying home for extended times due to pandemic-related travel restrictions, etc., they have had more opportunity to observe and find fault with their neighbors' levels of cleanliness, hygiene, and other potentially offensive behavior. There also have been more animal bite cases as people spend more time outside with their dogs, who don't always react well to strangers. As E-911 Coordinator, Chief Rutter has been working to generate addresses for all new domiciles. Zoning Administrator Mitch Osiecki has been very helpful in keeping him informed of any new structures. Chief Rutter would like to remind residents to put up proper signage if they live on a private road. This could make all the difference during an emergency call.

Chair Maxwell then asked if any of the Select Board members had any questions for Chief Rutter. Board member Stevens asked about a few road signs posted around town that designate Northfield as a "HEARTSafe Community." Chief Rutter said communities achieve this status if they meet specified criteria such as having an automated external defibrillator (AED) located at various locations within the community along with nearby persons trained in their usage (as well as CPR); having all ambulance units equipped with an AED; holding local public awareness campaigns regarding cardiac and other health-related concerns; etc. A few Central Vermont communities have achieved this status, which involves a good deal of paperwork. Northfield EMT Chris Golder spearheaded this effort for us. The three (3) signs were put up at strategic locations without much fanfare. Chief Rutter added that having HEARTSafe Community status can be a great asset when applying for grant funds. There being no other questions, Chair Maxwell thanked Chief Rutter for his report tonight and for his good work throughout the year. Chief Rutter will speak later regarding the NAS fee proposal.

VI. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. **Liquor License Application: Convenience Plus.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the liquor license application. Manager Schulz noted that since ownership of this store has changed hands, it is necessary for the new owner to apply for a new liquor license. There are no red flags regarding the new ownership, which is based in New Jersey. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **August 10, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Stevens abstaining.**

VIII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #04-22.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #04-22 in the amount of \$172,297.53. Board member Stevens noted the purchase of a ten (10) gallon water heater for \$657 and asked why it was so expensive. Manager Schulz will check on this. Board member Goodrich noted a \$30,000 payment for truck repairs and asked if this involved the grader. Manager Schulz confirmed it did. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through August 8, 2021.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$102,603.82. Board member Goodrich asked why there was a payment to the former Economic Development Director (Jon Ignatowski) as he resigned some time ago. Manager Schulz said Mr. Ignatowski was being compensated for some recent work on projects he started but this will be the last payment. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IX. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Northfield Ambulance Fee Schedule.** Manager Schulz said the NAS fee schedule hasn't been adjusted for a couple years and it was felt this was needed to remain competitive with other regional ambulance services. The current proposal was developed based on recommendations from Chief Rutter and in conjunction with our ambulance billing service. There is an overall fifteen percent (15%) increase for most services provided. Chief Rutter said the greatest change is that the medications used during an ambulance call (i.e., Glucose, Dextrose, etc.) will no longer be itemized. Itemization had been recommended by the previous ambulance billing agent but the current one advised against it as this can create problems in getting charges approved by Medicare, Medicaid, insurance companies, etc. It also is time consuming. These charges now will be grouped together. The overall increase in service charges was an attempt to maintain parity with other ambulance services in the area. Chief Rutter said there was much effort put into having the rates neither too high or too low. He added that such adjustments should be an annual process but uncertainties regarding the pandemic delayed it for a year. It also is good to have the new rates in place before the Select Board starts its process each autumn for determining the NAS budget for the following fiscal year. Manager Schulz added that we tried to use Barre Town Ambulance as the benchmark for setting the new rates. Chief Rutter said they also tried to get information from White River Valley Ambulance but they were not as forthcoming with their rate structure. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the NAS fee schedule as presented that would go into effect on September 1, 2021. Board member Stevens asked about the extrication charge. Chief Rutter said that was charged when the "Jaws of Life" had to be used to remove a patient from a damaged vehicle. Board member Stevens asked whether NU students were charged the resident or non-resident rate. Chief Rutter said that depends on their billing address. Those who have established local residence off-campus are charged the resident rate. Board member Goodrich asked why the "Institutional Lift Assist" charge was removed. Chief Rutter said that charge was established due to repeated calls for assistance to Mayo Healthcare in moving patients. Since the charge was established, Mayo Healthcare installed a new mechanism that allows their staff to perform this task without outside assistance. Chief Rutter said the "Treat – No Transport" charge covered NAS-assisted patient lifts at private residences. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Development Review Board (DRB) Appointment.** Manager Schulz said there is a vacancy on the DRB due to resignation. This was advertised locally but only one application has been received to date. Attempts to contact this person so he could perhaps attend this meeting to answer questions, etc. were unsuccessful so Manager Schulz recommends tabling the appointment for now. There was no objection.
- c. **2021 Grand List Errors and Omissions.** Manager Schulz said after the Listers finalize and lodge the Grand List, sometimes errors are later found in the way property values were determined, etc. that can be corrected by the Select Board. In this case, a parcel owned by the Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) was overvalued by about \$15,000 due to faulty information. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to change the value of this VELCO property from \$181,200 to \$166,700. Board member Morse felt that since this property is owned by a utility company, the local Utility Commissions should have been informed of this matter. Manager Schulz will make sure this is done in future. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- d. **Authorization for Town to Bid on Tax Sale Properties.** Manager Schulz said the next tax sale of properties with more than one year of delinquent taxes will be held on Thursday, August 26, 2021 at 3:00 p.m. There is one parcel located on Stony Brook Road with four (4) years of delinquent taxes totaling \$6,989.61. After consulting with the attorney handling the tax sale (William Smith), Manager Schulz is now seeking Select Board permission for the Town to bid on this property if no one from the general public is interested. This property has been the subject of inquiries involving the local Health Officer and Zoning Administrator regarding trash issues, a failed septic system, etc. Some of these concerns have been addressed but enough problems exist that might deter other potential bidders. Chair Maxwell asked what the maximum authorized bid amount should be. Given the delinquent taxes due, Manager Schulz suggested \$7,000. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to authorize Manager Schulz to bid up to \$7,000 on the tax sale parcel located at 3356 Stony Brook Road. Board member Morse noted the adjoining property owners have expressed a lot of concerns in the past regarding the amount of junk accumulating on this property as well as health issues. He felt the municipality purchasing this property might allow these concerns to be eventually addressed and also would send a signal to those who apparently feel no obligation to pay their property taxes. This mostly involves mobile home owners who are able to pay their trailer park rents to avoid being evicted but don't feel the need to pay their taxes. This is not fair to Northfield residents who do pay. Board member Goodrich asked if the municipality could become responsible for environmental cleanup costs if it purchases the property. Manager Schulz said the state's main concern was the failed septic system and that has been resolved. It was noted that the current property owner would have one year to redeem the property by paying all back taxes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- e. **Turkey Hill Farm Lease Agreement.** Manager Schulz has been working on a revision of the current lease agreement with this business. He has received new information that he would like to discuss with the Select Board members in executive session as this matter involves contract negotiation. There was no objection.

X. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **DRAFT FY 2020-2021 Financial Statements.** Manager Schulz said these financial statements were included in the packets. This information will not be finalized until the outside auditors have had the opportunity to go through it and complete their report. They are working in the Municipal Building with the Accounting Department this week. It does appear that there will be decent surpluses in both the Town General and Town Highway budgets. Much of this is related to the pandemic, such as unanticipated NAS revenue for conducting COVID-19 testing, restrictions on discretionary spending due to economic uncertainty at the start of the pandemic, etc. There also was a mild winter that reduced highway maintenance costs and savings in Northfield Police Department (NPD) personnel costs with two (2) of the fulltime officers on reserve military service. There also were additional state highway funds provided as grant programs were cancelled due to the pandemic. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio will attend a future Select Board meeting to provide a fuller picture of the municipality's financial situation.
- b. **South Main Street Sidewalk Project.** Manager Schulz said the project is nearly complete with only some minor work remaining. This includes finishing the connection of the new sidewalk to the old sidewalk on the Common, filling in some roadway gaps at the end of driveways, etc.
- c. **South Main Street Stormwater/CSO Project.** As Manager Schulz reported at a previous meeting (07/27/21), the amount of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) funds available for this project is much less than had been anticipated. Manager Schulz subsequently contacted ANR representatives regarding this discrepancy. Despite his attempt to push back on this, Manager Schulz said the ANR representatives kept emphasizing the amount of federal money that will become available for this project. Although they did not provide any figures, the indication was that the federal money would negate the necessity to bond for a local match amount. The suggestion from ANR was to complete the engineering phase of the project so the municipality will be able to apply for these federal funds as soon as they become available. In that light, Manager Schulz has invited the project engineer to address the Select Board members at the next meeting (09/14/21). Chair Maxwell asked if the federal funds ANR is talking about are separate from the COVID-19 fiscal local recovery funds discussed at recent meetings. Manager Schulz confirmed that they were.

- d. **Highway Department Update.** Manager Schulz said the highway crew have done a lot of good work in preparing Slate Avenue for its repaving this Friday (08/27/21). Board member Stevens was surprised the street was torn up down to the foundation. Manager Schulz said the street had a number of layers of old asphalt and the contracted paver felt it would be best to remove them before the new pavement is installed. This work also will maintain proper stormwater mitigation on the street.

XI. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **CVFiber Letter.** Board member Morse noted the letter from CVFiber that was in the Select Board packets. The letter was asking if any of its twenty (20) member communities would be willing to host a "hub structure" that would house high-speed internet equipment. Board member Morse is confused because it seems that CVFiber is asking for a downtown facility even though its initial mission statement made clear its intention to provide high-speed internet access to currently underserved rural areas. Board member Morse would not like to see CVFiber compete with existing internet providers. Manager Schulz said he has been researching this matter and yesterday held a remote meeting with Northfield's CVFiber representative (Ray Pelletier). He believes the request for a downtown host location is just an initial community outreach to determine the best locations for siting their infrastructure. Manager Schulz thinks their emphasis does remain on rural areas now underserved by high-speed internet providers. He will provide future updates as more information becomes available. Board member Goodrich also would like CVFiber to keep its focus on providing high-speed internet access to rural areas where it is currently not available at reasonable prices.
- b. **Economic Development Director Vacancy.** Board member Stevens asked if there has been any response to the advertisements for this position. Manager Schulz said three (3) letters of interest were received by yesterday's deadline. The next step will be to form an ad hoc committee to assist with the hiring process.
- c. **Public Recognition.** Chair Maxwell would like take this time to commend two (2) long-serving employees of the Northfield municipality. The first is Financial Director Laurie Baroffio, whose thirty (30) years of employment were celebrated last Thursday (08/19/21) with a small gathering of co-workers, friends, and family in the Community Room. Chair Maxwell was unable to attend at that time but he would like to commend Ms. Baroffio and her Accounting Department staff for their outstanding service. Chair Maxwell also would like to recognize Peter G. DeMasi, another thirty-year employee who worked in the Northfield Highway Department. Mr. DeMasi, who passed away on March 1, 2021, also served as Northfield's Fire Chief for several years. A funeral mass for Mr. DeMasi was held last Saturday (08/21/21) at St. John the Evangelist Church. This celebration of his life was well-attended by Northfield residents as well as by firefighters and other first responders from several Central Vermont communities.

XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a contract and a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:43 p.m.

Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:15 p.m. No action was taken.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of September 14, 2021.